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Illinois
and
Michigan
Canal
State Trail

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CONSERVATION

THE CANAL YESTERDAY

The Illinois-Michigan Canal was the impetus for the settlement and development of the entire northeastern portion of Illinois. The canal was directly responsible for the beginning of Chicago's growth as well as the cause for the development of Lockport, Joliet, Morris, Seneca, Marseilles, Ottawa, Utica and LaSalle-Peru.

The history of the Illinois-Michigan Canal is interesting since its origin actually started with the Indians at the Chicago Portage, the low divide between the waters of Lake Michigan and the Des Plaines River. The Indians used it as a carrying place long before the advent of the white man. This portage was also recorded in the annals of the French explorers Joliet and Marquette in 1673. It was noted in 1790 by the French military engineer Victor Collot and in 1807 by U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin in his report on roads and canals.

In fact, the original boundaries of Illinois were moved about 50 miles north in order to give Illinois a Coast on Lake Michigan and to insure that Chicago, the point at which the canal would connect with Lake Michigan, would be in Illinois. Construction of the canal was actually started by the State of Illinois in 1836 and was completed in 1848. It was financially successful from the start through its toll charges and the leasing of unused lands.

The I & M Canal, as it was known, once stretched 96 miles, linking Lake Michigan with the Illinois River at LaSalle, Illinois, the two bodies of water from which the canal took its name. It was cut at a cost of \$9.5 million in the bed of a river that is thought to have flowed down the same route about 8,000 years ago.

THE CANAL TODAY

On January 1, 1974, the canal was transferred to the Department of Conservation for the development of a hiking and bicycling trail 61.6 miles long from LaSalle, Illinois. About 28 miles of the canal, which now has water in it, will be used for canoeing. Historic preservation, interpretive programs and primitive camping are all design objectives for the ultimate development of the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

The Illinois and Michigan Canal State Trail is the Spine for the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, created in 1984.

The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor is a Federal designation, with a commission, to coordinate and assist the State and local governments, in developing the historical recreational and economic development of the Corridor, which extends from Summit to LaSalle, Illinois following the route of the historic Illinois and Michigan Canal.

Picnicking: Tables and grills are available at various areas in those sections now open.

Snowmobiling: There are 50 miles of marked snowmobile trails available on the Canal. You must register at entrances to snowmobile trails prior to use. Please call ahead for snow fall and base information.

Hiking and Bicycling: Various portions of the 61.5 miles of trail have been developed for hiking and bicycling. Some areas are not suitable at this time for bicycling. Hiking is available on approximately 51.8 miles of trail. All trails are marked and are classified as easy walking. Trail maps defining the various sections open to hiking and bicycling are available from the park headquarters.

Fishing: Bass, crappie, bluegill, catfish and bullheads can all be caught in the Canal. A current fishing license is required.

Camping: Backpack-carry in is allowed. Camping is available at Channahon and Gebhard Woods. A permit must be obtained from Park offices prior to camping.

Canoeing: Launch facilities are at Channahon, Aux-Sable, Gebhard Woods and LaSalle. There are approximately 28 miles of canoeing.

Canal Facts: Original length—96 miles.
Locks—15
Aqueducts—4
Feeders—4
Width (across top of water)
66'.
Reserve—90' both sides
Size of Locks—118' x 18'

GEBHARD WOODS

The slightly rolling terrain is dotted with many stately old shade trees including walnut, oak, cottonwood, ash, maple, sycamore and hawthorn. Wildflowers are abundant in the spring—trillium, bluebell, white trout lily, violets, wild ginger, phlox, spring beauty, and toothwort, followed by the wild strawberry and others.

Cardinals, bluejay and other birds make their home in the park, while the canal attracts mallards, wood ducks and great blue heron, along with beaver, muskrat, raccoon and an occasional deer.

Largest Tree: The largest tree in the state is one mile west of Gebhard Woods on the south side of the canal. The tree is an eastern cottonwood that stands 120 feet tall, has a crown spread of 105 feet and has a circumference of 32 feet 3 inches

Facilities

Picnicking: In the shaded areas, five picnic areas have tables and park grills. There is a large rustic shelter and two smaller ones. A restroom building, a water fountain that is accessible to the handicapped and hydrant are also available.

Playground: For those interested in sports there are a baseball diamond and horseshoe pits.

Fishing: Fishing is allowed in Nettle Creek, the Canal and the four ponds. Bass, crappie, catfish, bullhead and sunfish may be caught. A current fishing license is required.

Camping: Camping is limited to back pack tent and youth group camping. A permit must be obtained from the Site Staff before entering the campground. All groups of over 25 persons need advance permission to enter the park.

Canal Aqueduct: A picturesque stone aqueduct that was originally built to carry the canal over Nettle Creek adds to the park's beauty. The present aqueduct was restored and many of the stone structures and wooden shelters were built by the CCC during 1933–34.

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EFFIGY TUMULI

This 150 acre former mine site, which is approximately 1 mile long and rises 90 feet above the Illinois River, now contains five large earthen figures, or effigies, of aquatic animals native to this area. Represented in geometric form are a water strider, a frog, a catfish, a turtle, and a snake.

Inspiration for the Effigy Tumuli Sculpture was drawn from the mound building practices of prehistoric Indians in central and eastern North America. Thus, the Effigy Tumuli Sculpture is a deliberate reference to the mound builder's ancient artform and draws its name from their earth sculpting practices. As one of the largest earth sculptures ever built and the largest since Mt. Rushmore, the Effigy Tumuli Sculpture is a significant artwork in terms of its expansive size, subject matter, and use of earth with heavy construction equipment.

ILLINOIS & MICHIGAN CANAL VISITOR CENTER

The I & M Canal Visitor Center is located in the restored Gaylord Building, 35 miles Southwest of Chicago in the city of Lockport. The visitor center offers information on the public use areas managed by the IDOC as well as information on the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. The visitor center is open Tuesday thru Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For further information, call 815-838-4830. The Gaylord Building also houses a gallery of the Illinois State Museum and a restaurant facility.

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state site unless permission from the site superintendent has been obtained to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state sites are within easy access of every part of Illinois. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette and Giant City; White Pines Forest has cabins and dining rooms only, and Black Hawk has dining rooms only. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

Most state sites are open year round, except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more details on this site, contact the Site Superintendent, I & M Canal State Trail, P.O. Box 272, Morris, IL 60450 (815) 942-0796. For information on other sites, write the Illinois Department of Conservation, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62706.

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